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Issue Brief

Locating the Learning Component

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CGIAR is a global partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for a food secure future. The CGIAR Research Program on Livestock and Fish aims to increase the productivity of small-scale livestock and fish systems in sustainable ways, making meat, milk and fish more available and affordable across the developing world. The Program brings together four CGIAR Centers: the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) with a mandate on livestock; the WorldFish Center with a mandate on aquaculture; the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), which works on forages; and the International Center for Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), which works on small ruminants.

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The issue

In the original CRP proposal, one of the 9 Components was devoted to 'Monitoring, evaluation, impact assessment and learning'. During the subsequent streamlining of the CRP structure to reduce the 9 Components to 6 Themes, it was merged with the 'Gender & equity' Component to form the 'Gender & Learning' Theme. There have been objections that this did not make sense as a coherent Theme, and proposals have been made to shift the Learning component to be under the Management function or to be merged with the 'Targeting Sustainable Interventions' Theme. A final decision is needed.

Analysis

The Learning component was intended to address the following dimensions, which are roughly characterized in terms of their content in the righthand column:

As described in proposal	Functional areas
<i>Development of an M&E framework and appropriate tools at program and value chain level</i>	<u>Program M&E</u> : Relates to conventional M&E ('are we delivering what we promised'), but also to assessing progress in value chains ('how do we know the value chain is improving'). This is focused primarily on external demands for M&E.
<i>Process learning to improve learning during project implementation</i>	<u>Process M&E</u> = learning: Are we ensuring that we are continuously challenging our approach and assumptions and revising as needed as we generate more knowledge? This is internally oriented.
<i>Assessing outcomes and behavioural change among value chain actors</i>	<u>Impact pathways and outcome mapping</u> : Developing an explicit strategy for how our research outputs translate into targeted outcomes.
<i>Analysis of household and community outcomes and impact</i>	<u>Impact assessment and Theory of Change</u> : Generating evidence on whether research outputs have translated into outcomes and impacts, plus strategic research challenging the underlying assumptions of why we expect those outcomes and impacts to happen.

The arguments for each option can be summarized as follows:

Option 1: Put Learning component under the Management component	
FOR	AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&E and impact assessment are cross-cutting program-level functions that should be considered a collective good and therefore managed and funded by the CRP management office, especially since program M&E and certain impact assessments are required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing the M&E framework and commissioning impact assessments are responsibility of CRP management office, but implementation is responsibility of research teams Much of the Learning agenda is not program M&E and belongs within the research agenda
Option 2: Create Learning as a 7 th Theme	
FOR	AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning agenda is not an obvious fit in any other Theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The budget for Learning is less than 5% of the overall total, so is too small to merit

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledges importance of the Learning agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> separate administration The CO wants higher aggregation rather than a proliferation of Themes
Option 3: Maintain 'Gender & Learning' Theme	
FOR	AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender alone represents <6% of the budget and is expected to maintain that level, which is too small to be justified as a separate Theme on its own Some of the key Theory of Change research relates to pro-poor dimensions that fall under Gender & Equity The household-level focus of the gender agenda aligns well with the Learning agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many areas covered under Learning are unrelated to the gender agenda and so would be difficult for a Theme Leader to oversee M&E and Learning occurs across all the 3.7 Themes and should be integrated into each one as well as the larger CRP 3.7 Impact Framework.
Option 4: Merge Learning within Targeting Theme	
FOR	AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeting alone currently represents <6% of the budget, which is too small to be justified as a separate Theme on its own Some of the key Theory of Change and impact assessment-type research relates to targeting dimensions that fall under the Targeting Theme The original agenda envisaged for the Targeting Theme was to include household-level modeling, which could align well with the Learning agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Targeting Theme is expected to include the CRP's environment agenda, so though the budget is small now, it can be expected to grow significantly. Many areas covered under Learning are unrelated to the Targeting agenda and so would be difficult for a Theme Leader to oversee

Recommendation

Primarily to maintain Themes reasonably substantial for administrative purposes, and given some links with the gender agenda, **maintain the Gender & Learning Theme**. The other Themes have been limited to a single objective/outcome, but for this Theme, we would have two objectives/outcomes to accommodate the two agendas.

Responsibilities and costs associated with program M&E and commissioned impact assessment studies will need to be distinguished and funded from the management budget.